

Folsom pushes campaign reform

By Jamie Kizzire, Montgomery Advertiser

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Lt. Gov. Jim Folsom Jr., saying that voters need to know who's backing a candidate, is urging the Senate to approve a campaign reform bill that has historically died in that chamber.

Folsom spoke Tuesday to the Governmental Affairs Committee, which is reviewing a bill that would ban money transfers between political action committees. The practice has been criticized as a way to obscure the source of campaign donations.

"Voters have a right to know who is funding a campaign," said Folsom, who added that he learned during his campaign last year that it is a bill that voters want to see passed.

The bill has passed the House of Representatives. But it has passed in the House the past several years only to die in the Senate.

Sen. Wendell Mitchell, D-Luverne, the chairman of the Governmental Affairs Committee, said Tuesday's meeting was the first time the bill has been reviewed by a Senate committee.

The committee opted to review amendment proposals on the bill without taking a vote on it. It will take up the bill again April 10.

Mitchell said the bill has support among the leadership of the Democratic majority, including himself, Folsom and Senate President Pro Tem Hinton Mitchem, D-Union Grove.

Both Democratic and GOP candidates promised to support the ban during last year's campaigns. Republican Gov. Bob Riley has also urged the Senate to vote on the bill.

"We're all in favor of doing something," Mitchell said of the Democratic leaders.

He started the meeting by citing a newspaper article that said it would "snow in July" before it finds support in the Senate.

"I haven't looked outside, but I don't think it's snowing," he said.

But several senators submitted amendments clarifying certain provisions. Some lawmakers were concerned the bill had a loophole since a PAC could give money to a candidate who would pass it along to another candidate.

Another concern was that the bill might include political parties under its definition of a PAC. There were also questions about how the bill would affect money transfers between PACs under the umbrella of a larger organization.

The bill's sponsor, Democratic Rep. Jeff McLaughlin of Guntersville, listened to the suggestions, but warned he didn't want the bill "amended into oblivion."

He said the bill was written with a specific aim.

"I just want a rifle shot, not a shotgun blast," he said.

Sen. Larry Dixon, R-Montgomery, cautioned lawmakers about approving the bill with loopholes.

"Then all you've really done is shifted the public's viewpoint," he said.